

10.4. SCHOOLS*

Schools tend to have utmost control over internal factors that influence school safety, like their policies, programs, and practices. This section highlights various aspects of school-related factors like teachers, school structure, resources and information, lagging practices, and successful practices. Teacher themes comprise a discussion on teacher involvement and awareness, and time spent by teachers with students. School structure themes comprise the school's physical structure and student commute. Resource and information themes comprise discussions on monetary resources, information exchange, and law-related aspects of school safety. Lagging practices themes comprise lagging safety practices in schools as perceived by the interviewees and issues pertaining to special education students. And lastly, successful practices themes comprise successful safety practices and training as perceived by respondents, positive leadership roles, and positive student environments.

Teacher involvement and school safety

Teacher and staff involvement with students is an essential component in determining classroom and school environments. Interested and dedicated teachers play a very important role in targeting students who require attention. On the other hand, when teachers do not take an active interest in their students it can lead to very dire consequences. Thirty four percent of the interviewees (one aide, one bus driver, one counselor, one head of security, four principals and fourteen teachers) discussed the importance of teacher involvement in course of the interviews.

Interest

Teachers who display an active interest in students tend to have a very positive impact on their behavior and discipline. According to one principal (cell 13) students respond very well to involved teachers. *“Our teachers make themselves available to students, set themselves up by sharing and building a positive relationship with the kids. We have a good counseling staff that works really well with our kids and I think that students know that their administrative offices are always open and there is always a follow up”*.

On the same lines one teacher (cell 7) commented on the benefits of being there for the students. *“I told them that I'm not a counselor but I have some training, I'm a teacher and I'm a parent too. If you have anything you want to talk about do that, because some of them do come from really rough environments and they need to talk. They're just glad to come to school because they see their friends and they see their teachers that they like”*.

Understandably, however, not all teachers have the same amount of involvement with students according to a teacher (cell 10). *“Not all of our staff, even though we have a congenial staff, not all of our staff have the same emotional contact, it's a job”*.

* See Appendix 2 for cell references in text.

Dedication

While many teachers take interest in their students and help keep the school safe, there are some teachers who go an extra step and do things for their students on an emotional and personal level. Such dedicated teachers have a very lasting impact on their students' lives, especially in communities where students deal with a lot of personal problems. One teacher (cell 5) shared that *"I send birthday cards to all my students and I have a birthday cake that I bring in for the birthday kids once a month and it's little things like that. I'm working on ways to make them feel successful"*.

The teacher also noted that in communities where apathy exists in students' lives they benefit greatly through interaction and interest from teachers. *"I have personally interacted with a large number of parents and they ask why would you want to do better than I've done? What makes you think that you can do better than I did? And when you have that kind of a pervasive feeling it's hard to work with those kids. So our changes have to come within our classrooms. They have to come from within our hearts. We need people who are willing to work with these kids and just reach out a little bit and say you are special, you have a special day, you have a special way, there's something special about you"*.

The teacher went on to add that such dedication and interest comes more easily with experience. *"I feel as a more experienced teacher I'm able to focus more on students. And one of the things that I think is really important to communicate to students is that they really matter to me. I'm not just here to do a job, and so I really think the issue of classroom behavior is not so much a function of who the students are, but how are they treated and how is the classroom structured"*.

Another teacher (cell 15) remarked on the necessity of helping students without any personal biases when they are in need. *"I try as much as I can to be a friend to these kids, no matter how rotten they may be or how much I may dislike them personally. I try to make it so that they can feel comfortable to come and talk to me"*.

Discipline

A lot of the school environment also depends on the amount of time teachers spend disciplining their students. One teacher (cell 13) commented on how critical it is to have a discipline philosophy. *"I'm the one that's gonna have to deal with it day to day so I'm the one that better have the solution"*.

However, such an arrangement can be successful only if the administration is permissive of discipline by teachers. In the words of another teacher (cell 10) *"we don't send kids to the office and we take care of it ourselves. Any teacher here can request suspension or detention"*.

On the other hand, unfortunately, there are teachers who do not want to take on the responsibility of disciplining students. One teacher (cell 6) illustrated the same. *"There are some teachers that don't want to get involved in discipline issues. I had an incident last year where a teacher approached me and said there's something going on over there, I think there's going to be a fight. Rather than that teacher going over to break anything*

up, I went over to see what was going on. So there are some people that are afraid to get involved at all. I guess it is just fear for their personal safety”.

In summary, this section presented various perceptions regarding teacher involvement with students in making the school a safer place. Teacher interest, dedication, and discipline were some of the issues that were discussed. In the words of a teacher (cell 5) *“I don't believe institutions can do everything. That's where I as an individual, part of that institution, will do what I can to reach out to the kids individually. It's not just academic”.*

Role of teacher awareness

Several interviewees brought up the issue of teacher/ staff awareness with respect to school violence. Twenty eight percent of the respondents (two heads of security, five principals, one SRO, and ten teachers) discussed the benefits of staff awareness in school climate.

Awareness

The general consensus seems to be that student crime can be reduced to some extent with heightened awareness among the staff. One head of security (cell 9) remarked on the benefits from teacher awareness. *“We mostly catch them and we have teachers that come and tell us you know this person kind of stinks a little bit, check them out a little. Sometimes we'll end up with a bag or sometimes they come in just smoking one cigarette, marijuana stick and that's about it”.*

According to one principal (cell 16) *“the thing on drugs that we've been real successful with is awareness of faculty. If the faculty stays aware and lets us know, that's been our biggest success--just the involvement of faculty in letting us know, and some parents”.*

Teachers and staff can gain awareness through various means. Not only can they become aware of situations that are indicated to them by others, but they can also pick up clues from other means like students' writings, etc. Such clues can then be shared with the right authorities in order to provide troubled students with timely care. One teacher (cell 1) discussed a situation that was assessed through a student's writings. *“I felt it through his thoughts and the way he dressed. It was during the time we had a lot of school shootings, the very beginning when all of these things were going around across the nation. That's the first thing I told the administrators--I'm scared this kid might show up one day and just try to kill me or something. So we decided that we would just watch him very closely. And all of us that were involved with him, including his mother, watched him very closely. We let the parents know what was going on. He was obviously very frustrated and we found out that he had some personal problems. There were a lot of things going on at home and they were resolved”.*

While there are benefits from staff awareness and information, staff also benefits from student awareness and communication, which can be conveyed to the appropriate authorities. For example, one principal (cell 13) pointed that *“the administration and*

teachers are out among the students a lot, we are seen on campus before school, during lunch, between classes, after school, so we have a pretty good rapport and a pretty good relationship and we receive a lot of information from kids about so and so has got something on them today”.

Although it is recognized that staff awareness is often a key factor in preventing incidents in the school environment, such awareness comes more naturally with increased experience. For example, one teacher (cell 13) revealed that *“as a teacher now, having a lot more information about what really is going on, I’m much more attentive and can recognize things much quicker and always have it, not in the front of my head, but just in the back of my mind that if something seems strange, I’m going to pay close attention until I figure out that really nothing’s wrong, or there’s a problem here, and then alert the proper person”.*

Training

Since staff awareness is a valuable asset in controlling the school environment many schools have started providing training in such areas in order to equip their staff with the right skills. One SRO (cell 11) shared that the *“sheriff’s department put on a drug recognition class for the teachers to actually let them be aware of some of the common effects, or side effects, that they may see in their students. I’ve had several teachers bring students to me stating some of the effects that they think they’re seeing, and that’s when I’ll check the students for the drugs”.*

One principal (cell 9) discussed a similar training strategy on gangs. *“He comes in a couple of times and talk to teachers about gangs and about tagging and different things that they need to look for, or things that they hear or colors. We talk quite often with them and have in-services about what they need to be careful of. We talk to them about being outside of the classrooms because if you have teachers between classes that are outside, because that’s where the kids congregate, their physical presence, the visibility, makes a big difference. They’re aware of it, we constantly have in-services about things like that”.*

In summary, this section discussed the benefits that emerge from teacher and staff awareness in reducing/ preventing school violence. Awareness training and experience were also discussed with respect to school safety.

Teacher time with students

In course of the interviews almost eight percent of the respondents (five teachers) perceived a relationship between the amount of time teachers spend with students and school violence. This issue becomes especially relevant with higher teacher mobility in some schools/ districts. According to a teacher (cell 3) *“one of the biggest things you could do is get teachers to stay at the same place over a period of time because that could solve a lot of your problems.”*

Student security

The amount of time teachers spend in schools seems to have an important bearing on the amount of trust that students impart in teachers and on information they might be willing to share with them. In the words of a teacher (cell 9) *“so often students feel that the school is like a revolving door, teacher's here and then she's gone, or he's gone. I think the longer a person is here, the more secure the kids, even into the second generation, feel with the teachers”*.

Teachers as managers

Another benefit from long-term retention of teachers is that the teachers become better managers and more student-centered, which in turn aids in discipline. In the words of a teacher (cell 9) *“when I first started teaching there were instances where I felt unsafe but that was mostly my insecurities as a new teacher, now I can't recall the last time I felt unsafe”*.

On the same lines one teacher (cell 10) shared that *“I have observed sometimes when there's substitutes that don't know the system and don't know how things work, if they're not consistent, sometimes they have classroom management problems*.

In summary, some of the common sentiments shared by teachers about the benefits of lessened teacher mobility are that the longer teachers stay in their respective schools the better they get at classroom management and the more that encourages students to impart trust in them. This is bound to impact discipline positively.

School physical structure

The design and structure of school buildings can play a definite role in the kinds of incidents that can take place among students. For example, hidden spots, dark corners, etc., are always more conducive to violence and fights. Sixty three percent of the interviewees (one bus driver, three heads of security, eleven principals, one SRO, and twenty-four teachers) shared their perceptions on the role played by school physical structure in school violence.

Campus fencing

Many schools have opted to fence their campuses for enhanced safety. Some of the schools interviewed revealed concerns regarding the absence of fencing. One bus driver (cell 7) pointed that *“as I go down to the valley I see really good perimeters around the school, good safety nets, where it's hard for a person to get in. Around here you can just walk in at midnight, that's not what I call safe”*.

A principal (cell 7) had a similar concern because *“sometimes we have some traffic going through our campus, we have people walking through, so that puts us on alert every now and then”*.

Restrooms

A lot of the fights and disagreements in schools happen in the restrooms because they are frequently separate for the kids and the adults, and are often without adequate adult supervision. One principal (cell 5) commented that *“one of the things we do is we lock the doors open in many bathrooms as long as the locks are working. So the students have a sense that we can hear what's going on in there and that's helped reduce that problem”*. One teacher (cell 9) supported this point by stating that *“if it would be any place it would be the restrooms. If someone really wants to get somebody that's where they'll get them”*.

Basements and hallways

Many schools have basements which students are partial to when it comes to school violence. This is because frequently the basements are dark and/ or relatively less supervised. One principal (cell 14) perceived that *“the greatest problem area in the past had been the basement of the cafeteria. We had some classes in there and that was problematic because they had to walk down some stairs and so if they wanted to do something they could do it, and pretty much be secure that they could probably get away with it”*.

In course of the interviews one of the most commonly mentioned problem spots was the hallway. This is because students are constantly on the move through the day as they change classes, and hallways are places where they bump into each other and start fights or get into other kinds of trouble. One teacher (cell 5) shared that *“the halls are a problem, they're very crowded and that's where the kids start the name calling and the shoving. If a kid gets bumped into, either intentionally or otherwise, that's going to escalate further on down the line into a-- you shoved into me I'll shove you back. And pretty soon you've got a fight”*.

Playground and cafeteria

The playground is another place where many fights occur in the school. Although this does not have anything to do with the physical structure of the school, it is a place that by its very nature is conducive to fights between students. One teacher (cell 5) revealed that *“if there's going to be any hot spot the playground probably would be the biggest one, when kids have free time”*.

In addition to gathering for playtime and moving between classes, cafeterias are one other place where students gather in course of the day. This shared time leads to fights and misunderstandings between students. One teacher (cell 14) remarked that *“most of our fights usually start near food because that's a time people talk and things happen”*.

Hidden spots

Most schools have areas that are usually a little hidden due to the architecture and can become isolated when not supervised. Such areas frequently attract incidents. One head

of security (cell 14) pointed out that *“the worst place would probably be under the bleaches if they can get away and get there. And that would be because they want to have a cigarette or trade, or maybe they have something they might want to smoke. If they go out that way you know that they're in trouble already because of what they have in mind isn't a good thing. So they've already given you probable cause”*.

Many fights and disagreements take place when students are moving between buildings. It is difficult to supervise each area in the school on a constant basis and areas between buildings are a constant source of concern to monitors. One teacher (cell 6) commented that *“we have problems before and after school just between the buildings. Most of the fights that I'm aware of have happened in between the buildings. There are only so many places we can be, even though we have duty stations, and that's where kids find the little nooks and crannies”*.

School size

Many interviewees discussed class and school size as factors that can influence the amount of violence that takes place in schools. One teacher (cell 1) from a small school perceived that *“because we're such a small school we very seldom have fights, I guess it's because we're small”*.

Building appearance and lighting

Building appearance might not have anything to do with the physical structure but does signal the condition of the environment in general. A clean building, devoid of any graffiti or vandalism, promotes discipline and control within the school. One principal (cell 1) shared that *“if the school's clean, your classroom's clean, the restrooms are clean, and you know you're clean, it sets the mindset for discipline”*.

It is essential for the school buildings to be well lit at all times, especially early morning and late at night when the neighboring areas are isolated. Bad lighting can lead to incidents that are unsafe for the kids. One principal (cell 15) revealed *“we have a three story structure. The basement has inadequate lighting in the hallways and we seem to have a higher than average instance of fights on that floor”*.

School neighborhood

In addition to the schools' own physical structure and parameters the kind of neighborhood surrounding the school also plays a role in school safety. Some interviewees pointed that their school's immediate neighborhoods had parks and other areas where students could congregate and fight. One principal (cell 15) discussed a similar situation. *“On the east side of campus there is city property which contains outdoor facilities. That area is a major problem for us because it's not school property and the kids want to go sit at the picnic tables and that's where they want to smoke, that's where they want to hang out and not go to class”*.

In summary, this section discussed the influence of the school physical structure on school safety. The physical aspects of campus fencing, restrooms, basement, hallways, playground, and cafeteria were discussed in relation to the kinds of activities that can take place there. Hidden spots and school size were also discussed. Cleanliness, lighting, and neighborhoods surrounding the schools were also pointed out as concerns in school crime.

Student commute and crime

Several respondents discussed incidents of violence during student commute. Twenty percent of the interviewees (two principals and eleven teachers) discussed school violence that occurred in buses and at bus stops.

Bus

Criminal incidents take place on buses on a pretty regular basis and it is very cumbersome for the drivers to manage students while they are driving. Weapons are brought on board quite frequently. One teacher (cell 1) shared that *“the other day they had some razor blades on the bus, and I don't know how they managed that”*. Another teacher (cell 6) knew that *“some kids were smoking at bus stops”*, and has heard of *“fights on the buses before. I've heard of you know, intimidation and things like that”*. Yet another teacher (cell 11) discussed vandalism on the bus. *“In previous years they've cut seats and stupid things and tore up the bus”*.

The benefit of cameras on buses to curtail such crime was illustrated by a teacher (cell 4). The teacher perceived that *“discipline has been difficult on the bus, they installed cameras and that kind of nipped a lot of that in the bud”*.

One teacher (cell 4) referred to a bomb-threat incident on their bus and how the school handled it. *“There was, I think it was last year or the year before, a bomb threat on the bus, and it was handled very discreetly. They got the staff together and said look here's what's happening and here's what you need to look for and here's what you need to be doing, and I guess they did all the necessary things to check the bus and check the students, and it was resolved pretty quietly and quickly”*. This example helps illustrate what schools have to deal with in such instances.

More violent incidents like hazing can also occur on buses if proper precautions are not taken. In the words of a teacher (cell 15) *“they took kids on a bus, after say a basketball game on the way home, or track meet or whatever, and took them to the back of the bus, or called them to the back of the bus, held them down, covered their mouth”* and took part in hazing.

While many schools follow various procedures to curtail violence in buses there have been instances of local involvement also. In the words of one principal (cell 6) some communities have serious enough problems on their buses to warrant local solutions. *“We were having some issues on some buses within the community and the parents really felt strong about that so they came in and volunteered and started riding buses and things”*.

Bus stops

Bus stops are places where students are seldom under any adult supervision and incidents tend to take place. One teacher (cell 9) indicated that *“waiting at the bus stop when you walk from your house to where the bus is gonna pick you up, that's where stuff like that happens. That's usually where the event happens that we may see retribution for at school. You know, your little sister beat up my little sister, so now I'm gonna beat you up”*.

To summarize, in the words of a teacher (cell 6), *“I'd say if there's anything it's the buses and the bus stops before they get to school where some of these main incidents and fighting occur”*.

Monetary resources for school safety

Lack of resources is often brought up in conversations with school personnel, especially schools in remote areas and schools with high crime. Inadequate resources or need for additional resources for safety requirements was discussed by seventeen percent of the respondents (six principals and five teachers).

Insufficient resources

Many respondents were concerned with the insufficient funding available to keep schools safe, especially in high crime areas. One principal (cell 5) discussed the need for state funding for high-crime schools. In the principals words *“we need to take a look at those schools that don't receive assistance and see what we can do to target them. If we're in a high crime rate area and we're not receiving any special assistance because we don't fall within the parameters of any guidelines, I think we need to look at that, because it's detrimental to learning if we don't come up with some assistance for those schools such as this one”*.

One teacher (cell 2) shared a concern with state funding for schools and how it ties in with issues like school safety. The teacher stated that *“the problem that still goes with this whole process is the way they fund public schools. You can't keep running the system on a shoestring budget”*.

Need based funding by school was suggested by one teacher (cell 1). According to this teacher *“all schools, no matter where you are in the city or in the rural communities, need to be able to provide a safe environment for students”*. Also, *“you can't expect rural Arizona to be given the same monies or the same regulations as what you are going to have in inner or city schools”*.

On similar lines another teacher from the reservation (cell 7) added that *“money is real tight up here and we need these people that are specializing in this (school safety) to help us out. At times it's not in the budget and we need that in order to provide a safe place for the kids and for them to get a good education and be able to move on into the big world, besides being on the reservation”*.

Funding for School Resource Officers (SRO)

SROs were considered as essential for school safety by many interviewees. One principal (cell 11) conveyed that it would be very beneficial if the funding continued in *“areas like your School Resource Officers, I think that schools being able to continue those types of programs is very important”*. Another principal (cell 15) agreed that *“one of the greatest things for us was when we found that there was grant money available for an SRO, and getting that into place”*.

Funding for alternatives

Interviewees discussed students with special needs and the relevance of alternatives for them when required. In this connection *school within a school* was discussed. One teacher (cell 15) indicated that *“we need funding to take care of these kids, and some of them become the discipline problems because they really don't learn by sitting in a desk and reading in a book. They don't learn that way. We need some kind of setting here on campus so they're still be part of what's going on, and part of the extracurricular and all that, but they can learn in the way that they learn”*.

On the same lines one principal (cell 5) commented that *“funding for alternatives is a hindrance because we don't have enough of it. So finding alternatives for students to go to is difficult, many times because they're full and it's difficult to find places for students who really shouldn't be in school, or they should be in school but not in this one. Also, currently we have in school suspension but it's monitored by a non-certified person because we can't afford a certified person. So it would be helpful to be able to fund somebody who has some expertise other than just kind of a monitor in that area”*.

In summary, better school funding in general, and funding of schools in rural and/ or high crime areas in particular, were discussed. In addition, funding for alternative schools and SROs was also discussed as mechanisms to keep down school violence.

Information exchange in school

Exchange of safety related information was considered vital by some respondents in course of the interviews. Various issues were discussed with regard to this process by nine percent of the respondents (four principals and two teachers).

Guidelines for mandates

Some respondents were of the opinion that while schools were being mandated to carry out various safety-related procedures there were gaps in information provided to them to complete the task successfully. One teacher (cell1) shared the need for all state mandates on school safety to be financed and regulated because *“it's really hard for us when they just step in and tell us you need to do this, and they don't tell us how nor provide us with whatever support we need to get it done”*.

Another concern voiced was on the improper communication of information between various stakeholders and it was from a principal (cell 12). According to the principal *“there isn't good communication between state head office the legislature and schools. We get the mandates, but we're not involved in the other end of why is this even being proposed, how could it be proposed better, what will help schools?”*

Information on resources

Another concern that was shared with respect to information sharing pertained to resources on school safety. One principal (cell 2) mentioned the importance of being made aware of, as a school, about the options and resources available to them with regard to school safety. In the principals words *“if there's more people I can call up and say can you come and help us out, give us an in-service, talk with the kids, having more resources, or a web site where I can find these resources at, if they're free or cheap...”,* that would be beneficial.

A similar concern was voiced by another principal (cell 7). *“I know there's a big word called accountability in the state of Arizona, and us being up here..., sometimes there is a lack of communication, sometimes maybe there are good programs out there, maybe there are resources, maybe there is funding, but sometimes we don't get wind of it. And because we're at a distance away, I think sometimes it is to our disadvantage.”*

Sharing information with students

A frequent topic of discussion amongst school staff is regarding the number of safety related procedures that should ideally be shared with students. One of the teachers (cell 13) was concerned about the amount of information that can be imparted to students with regard to school safety and any related issues because *“certainly we've got to involve them, but going too much in depth and providing too much information, may not be the best answer, especially for all of the students”*.

In summary, this section discussed issues pertaining to information sharing on school-safety including information sharing with external sources like stakeholders and legislators and internal sharing with students.

Legal aspects of school safety issues

When it comes to school safety several laws have been designed to protect the students. While most of the laws have a desired impact on school safety some laws were viewed by the interviewees as unsafe or even inconvenient and cumbersome. Thirty percent of the respondents (one head of security, eleven principals, one SRO, and six teachers) discussed some of these problems in course of the interviews.

Special education students

One of the issues most frequently raised by almost all the respondents was the restrictions imposed by special education laws on classroom discipline and safety. Even though

special education laws have been designed to protect the interests of students belonging to that group there are several instances where the very same laws jeopardize the safety of the overall student population. One principal (cell 4) remarked that *“special education laws need to protect all students. Provisions need to be made for students who are of a danger to other students before we force them to be in school where they pose an immanent danger. I don't think the answer is just to put them out on the road either”*.

Another principal (cell 12) agreed with this argument. *“The (special education) laws are not written appropriately and they need to be changed. It is reasonable to accommodate students and help them with their education and do all these things, and there are lots of good things that came out of that law. But when it comes to the behavior of students that law needs to change to protect the other students, staff, and the school”*.

Given the laws it becomes very difficult to discipline and/ or suspend special education kids. Such a situation can be potentially harmful to the general welfare of students when it comes to unsafe behavior within the school premises. One principal (cell 5) revealed that *“we have significant problems disciplining special education students because of the fact that they are protected by law and we cannot suspend them for more than a certain number of days. In some situations where we normally would expel a student you cannot expel a special education student in our district. I think many of these students impact the regular education population because the degree of discipline that we can render to them is less than we can render to the general population”*.

Another principal (cell 12) brought up a similar issue where the law makes it difficult to place special education students in alternative settings. *“I tried to have his placement changed to say that this is an inappropriate placement and long-term suspended him and wanted him put in a different kind of school where we could keep him safe and keep our kids safe, but I was unable to do that. That resulted in a lawsuit from the parents on the district, and then a settlement. The lawyers made a settlement and so the student came back to our school and this year he took a special education aide, grabbed him and threw him up against the wall. So he's still here”*.

Reservation laws

The reservation schools have some unique problems when it comes to their own local laws versus state laws. In the words of one teacher (cell 11) *“I just think that a reservation is like a country within itself and they have their own laws and their own rules. I think over a period of time they just look the other way”* when something does not pertain to their laws.

One example of this problem was provided by a principal (cell 7). *“Our school works a lot with the state of Arizona, and our nation's police. So sometimes we'll have some jurisdictional issues that we have to work through and one of the hard things working with the nation is they don't really have a revised children's code. It's a very old code that is not designed for today's drug situations and so they can beat the system. Another problem is that if we have an offense that occurs here, a lot of times the county or the state will say let the nation take care of it. And sometimes the nation is reluctant to*

handle some of these things that occur because they say you are a state school. And so we get into some of that overlap and into some jurisdictional issues”.

On the other hand, one principal (cell 9) discussed how the reservations are trying to change some of their laws to better suit the present needs of schools. *“This year we have changed a lot of the legislation with the tribal government, so that there are more consequences for certain types of activities that the students do. This is because some of the federal laws might hold here but the state laws don’t”.*

Personal contact with students

Some teachers commented on the laws that restrict personal contact with students. While the teachers understand the reasons behind such a law, it still makes it difficult for them to probe into students’ problems and help them meaningfully. One teacher (cell 2) observed that *“in the legislature right now there's that law about what teachers can and can't ask. It is not like we pry but we have to be able to, especially counselors, sit and talk to the kids. There are a lot of abusive situations at home, whether it's physical or mental, and a trained professional at the site may be your only source of intervention”.*

Another teacher (cell 3) brought up a situation where a student might just want a reassuring hug from their teacher, and difficulties that could result because of restrictions being imposed on physical contact between the student and staff. *“I can see a point for it somewhat because you hear stories about teachers molesting kids and stuff like that and so everybody's kind of paranoid about it. It's too bad it has to be that way. Because I had one kid one year who would come in everyday just to give me a big hug”.*

Post-facto action

There are many instances where action can not be taken before an incident takes place in a school because of the way in which the law is designed. A preventative course of action can be a lot safer for students when compared to post-facto action. One teacher (cell 6) alluded to this. *“I think as a teacher the thing that frustrates me the most is there is, for example, one student this year that I think could be a real threat. To me personally and to other students. We've done all we can do legally but because he hasn't physically done anything it's like we have to wait for him to actually hurt somebody before we can really do anything. And this kid is a loose canon”.*

In summary, this section discussed the various problems that schools face in disciplining special education students due to their laws, although they largely do meet the original intent of helping students with such needs. Some of the other issues discussed were laws pertaining to reservations, personal student contact, and post-facto actions for school violence.

Lagging practices in school safety

In course of the interviews most respondents discussed school safety practices they either perceived as unsuccessful or as missing from the system. While some of their comments pertained to their respective schools others were more general in nature. Eighty nine percent of the respondents (one aide, three bus drivers, two counselors, three heads of security, fifteen principals, four SROs, and twenty-nine teachers) discussed lagging practices with respect to school safety in course of the interviews.

Lagging school safety policies

Many issues were noted by the respondents with respect to lagging school safety policies. Some of the policies discussed were warning recognition, conflict resolution, crisis management, student sign-out policies, hiring practices for required personnel, dress codes, class size, cameras, lockers, and suspension policies.

Warning signs

Unfortunately, many incidents have taken place in schools that could have been prevented if the students or staff had noted warning signs from the perpetrator. There were mixed feelings about looking for warning signs among the interviewees. While some noted benefits in the option others were cautious because it might falsely brand certain students as problematic. Some were also of the opinion that the process of looking for warning signs might not be very helpful. One counselor (cell 12) observed that *“there's always a student who has the potential and we're not aware of it. And it's the quiet ones that we don't really communicate with, that are the ones that raise the red flag. So while the warning signs are helpful, I don't think they're always entirely accurate. But I think you have to cover the broad spectrum”*.

Conflict resolution

Students often find it difficult to resolve conflicts amicably and training them in the process might be very beneficial in preventing crime. In the words of a principal (cell 5) *“I would say there are some perceptions that the climate needs to improve in terms of dealing with conflict resolution. Our kids have a hard time resolving conflicts through verbal means, so there are other means that they choose to do that with, and that is an issue in general”*.

Crisis response

In the unfortunate event that a school experiences violence it is important to have the support and guidance of a crisis response team. In the words of a counselor (cell 3) schools can benefit a great deal with the existence of a crisis response team. *“I would like to see a crisis response team, which we don't have. I think that every school should have it because anything can happen, be it a tragic thing or otherwise”*.

Sign-out policy

All schools have a sign-out policy for students through which their custodians can sign them out. There have been instances of abuse to this arrangement in some schools and students have left the school premises without anybody's knowledge. One principal (cell 4) discussed that *"we have a problem with students disappearing and teachers not being told and we're having a hard time enforcing signing out at the office. The emergency contact and who may sign my child out are two different things. They're somewhat related but they're two different things, so that's got to be fixed"*.

Peer mediation

Peer mediation and student support groups were considered as useful by various respondents, and their absence was considered as something that needed to be rectified. One teacher (cell 9) commented that *"we have had over the years student support groups led by trained teachers where kids could come together and talk about whatever they wanted. Those were useful but we no longer have them"*.

While peer mediation was recommended, one teacher (cell 9) also cautioned to the unsuccessful outcome of bringing in students to share their personal experiences, as examples, with their peers. *"One thing that doesn't work in my opinion is bringing in the reformed student to tell the horror stories about--yeah I partied all the time, I never went to class, and now I've reformed my life and turned it around. Well the kids hear the glory part at the beginning, and either they don't hear the hit bottom part, went to prison, stuff like that, or they just say well yeah I guess I'll do that and then I'll become rich and successful like this guy too"*.

Dress codes

Dress code has been a debated issue in many schools but some interviewees preferred the policy of having a dress code in the school in order to reduce some of the discipline problems. One principal (cell 14) remarked that *"I would imagine that we could probably solve quite a few of our problems if we instituted uniforms. But God help me if I ever mention it out there because that's the old teenager standpoint of don't tell me how to dress"*.

Fencing

Fencing open campuses was recommended by various respondents in order to maintain a safe school climate. One SRO (cell 11) suggested that *"I would like to see a fence go up and surround the entire school. I'm real concerned with people coming off the street and onto the school to cause any harm to the campus or the kids"*.

Open campuses are often very vulnerable and some interviewees discussed this concern. One principal (cell 4) remarked that *"it's just open to the forest with trails crossing through the campus randomly. In other words, visitor trails cross right through the"*

campus, public trails cross right through the campus, and there's no fence. That's an uncomfortable thing, even though we feel very safe here and there's never been an issue, we're very vulnerable".

Substance abuse

Substance abuse is problematic in most schools and many interviewees stated a preference for stricter drug policies. One teacher (cell 9) revealed that *"I think we're too easy on drug abusers. I think that should be grounds for long-term suspension, and sometimes I think they're just slapped on the hands for possession and that sort of thing".*

Hiring autonomy

It is essential to have autonomy in hiring appropriate staff in order to implement successful school safety practices. In the words of a principal (cell 5) *"I think the obstacles are the hiring of personnel that you can work with. Sometimes you don't have those rights because people need to be moved in the system and so the camaraderie or ability to work with people may be not as you'd like it because of the fact that you're not able to select them. I think that impacts how you work with what's going on in the building".*

Reporting of incidents

Some interviewees objected to the new laws that mandate all incidents of school violence to be documented. This is because such documentation labels students permanently, even if their crimes are not very big. One SRO (cell 5) pointed that *"they're telling the principals and the vice principals that every little suspected incident that happens in a school, not actually even happened, should be notified to the police. If I were to document every little incident that happened at the school I would not be able to do my job. Also, what that does is once you send that information it's public information and the kid is in the system for ever".*

Lack of prevention measures

Almost all schools have come to realize the importance of prevention of school violence over reaction to school violence. Some interviewees stated lack of prevention measures in schools as a concern. In the words of a teacher (cell 6) it is essential for schools to become proactive in order to maintain a safe school climate. *"Education as a whole tends to be more reactive than proactive and I would just like to see us be a lot more proactive. And I think this administration is really concerned and really caring about that kind of stuff, but there's always that little bit of, well it will never happen here kind of a thing".*

One bus driver (cell 7) observed that *"maybe a child has reported to the proper authorities, but that person does not handle the situation right away. They kind of let it escalate to a point where it gets out of control. Instead of dealing with the problem right there they use excuses like they don't have the type of things to deal with that, they don't*

have counselors, or that's not their problem. They are intimidated that if they do something they're going to get in trouble and they don't want to do something that's going to effect their career".

Unattended incidents

Involvement from all teachers and staff is vital in order to maintain a safe school climate. If situations go unattended or ignored by adults it definitely leads to serious problems like a lack of discipline. One principal (cell 10) commented that *"many times I walked past situations that somebody should have been dealing with, and saw other staff members who were going past the same one and walked past it in front of me. When I stopped them and asked how they could just walk past they said that those were not their kids, that they did not even know who they were"*.

According to one teacher (cell 3) when situations go unheeded by administrators they could have undesirable consequences. *"We had a kid who was in all kinds of trouble and we kept telling the principal something has to be done, but they just ignored us. Finally, he tried to burn the school down and then he got everybody's attention"*.

Lack of uniformity/ consistency

School safety and discipline are hinged on uniformity and consistency. Students are constantly receiving signals from the adults and it benefits them a lot when rules and regulations are set and followed closely and consistently. According to one principal (cell 16) while consistency and uniformity are essential ingredients in school safety, such an approach needs to be implemented top-down. *"I think if you want to have effective schools, there better be a clear understanding of what you expect academically and behaviorally and I think it has to start from the school board all the way down. If you don't get that support and cooperation, I don't care who you put in the schools, they're gonna have problems. I think the school boards need to understand that the administration and teachers need all the things available to them to run the school and discipline is one of the key factors"*.

One teacher (cell 7) agreed with the importance of top-down consistency in order to maintain a safe school climate, especially when the board gets involved. *"Sometimes when we report an incident to the principal the student is put out of school or expelled. When it goes to the board they say let's give the student another chance. So, some of the policies are not being backed up by the administrators. The teachers write up referrals and nothing happens and it gets to the point where some teachers just give up and they don't care anymore"*.

In the words of a principal (cell 1) *"if the teacher doesn't do a good job and doesn't have a good discipline plan and isn't consistent in what he or she does, then I can guarantee trouble"*. On the other hand, one teacher (cell 5) commented on the lack of consistency at the administrative level and the outcome of such inconsistencies. *"Both our vice principals claim to be on the same page but they are not. Discipline by one vice principal*

is not meted out equally and is not consistent. When we say this is the rule, it must be enforced, otherwise there's no point in having the rule. And when kids see it's being enforced off and on that's a problem".

Lack of communication

In course of the interviews, communication between students, teachers, and school staff was perceived as one of the most important factors in maintaining school safety. This was also one of the factors that was perceived as lacking in many schools for various reasons. It is very important for all staff to interact with the school's lead administration, like the principal, or at least to know who they are for times of emergency or need. For example, some interviewees shared a concern that they did not know the school principal. According to one bus driver (cell 8) *"I can't say I'm really familiar with the principal because I haven't really met him or her".*

In the words of one principal (cell 14) communication between administration and teachers is necessary but not carried out consistently. *"I think we can be more effective administratively about informing teachers about trends. Or if it is very evident that something happened to come in and say look this is what occurred without violating student privacy issues. I think we've done better recently than we've done in the past, but I think we have a ways to go. It's very labor intensive to do that and that's another part of the problem".*

One teacher (cell 16) commented on the importance, and difficulty, of being kept informed about incidents in the school that are being tackled by other teachers or staff. *"I'd like to know when certain things occur on campus that may not have occurred in my room. Sometimes we don't hear about it, then again, how do you handle that line of trying not to cause panic, because some teachers are not always the best about keeping things discreet".*

Another teacher (cell 5) agreed that even when students are suspended the teachers seldom get to know the cause for suspension. *"Even when students are suspended we're not told why they're suspended, it could be for profanity, it could be for fighting, it could be for weapons violations or drugs, and we're not told".*

Just like it is important to have communication within the school it is also important to have communication between various departments or divisions that interact with the school. One bus driver (cell 8) commented that *"being in a totally different department I don't even know if they do lock down procedures or anything. If you're in a accident where will the students stand, I don't know anything about what they do".* Such lack of communication with transportation might prove to be very harmful in the time of crisis.

Lack of discipline

Discipline in schools in general, and classrooms in particular, has always been an issue best dealt with by teachers. However, this trend has changed in the recent past with more authority being given to administrators and not teachers. Many respondents perceived this as a problem. One teacher (cell 10) discussed that *"when discipline was taken out of the*

hands of the administrators and the teachers, and was allowed to be circumvented, parents made calls to the superintendent when incidences happened instead of talking to the teacher. Discipline needs to be given back to the classroom teacher and needs to be reinstated into the local administrators, and the upper administration on the district level need to stay out of it because that is not their expertise. I've been in education long enough to know that when corporal punishment was removed from the classroom discipline fell apart".

Inadequate training

Training is of great significance when it comes to preparing students, teachers, and the staff in school safety. Many interviewees shared concerns with regard to the inadequate training provided by school sites. Some key training that was perceived as missing in schools was training for bullying and intimidation, reporting suspicious information, and diffusing volatile situations.

Almost all schools have policies against bullying and intimidation. However, it is left to the discretion of the teacher or staff to decide when an incident is considered as bullying or intimidation in their classroom. In other words, such judgements are often subjective and might benefit from training. In the words of one principal (cell 9) *"it's not like drugs or weapons where we all know what to do in certain cases. But the other kinds of things, the bullying, the intimidating, the threatening, that I think need guidelines. I don't even know if you could really have guidelines for something like that or if it's just a judgment call. That's my biggest area of concern".*

One of the important techniques of prevention is through training students to report any suspicious activities in the school, but most schools do not offer any training in this technique. According to a principal (cell 9) *"I haven't talked to the students a great deal about what they should and shouldn't report, maybe that's something that we need to do. I guess we're kind of assuming that they know that on their own, but that may not always be the case".*

It is important for teachers to get trained in diffusing volatile situations. In the event that the teacher is not comfortable in doing that the consequences can be disastrous. In the words of a principal (cell 3) *"one of the problems that I see happen, and it can lead to violence, is that we still have staff members who don't know how to diffuse situations. When a student is upset and the teacher feels like they've been disrespected, we sometimes have our teachers act like the kids and make the situation worse, where then the student ends up swearing at a teacher and may even push the teacher or something like that. Whereas if the teacher had played the professional we would have never had the incident get to where it was. So I think there is room for training, specifically with certain staff members that have a hard time dealing with situations like that".*

It is important to teach students how to think and reason in the classroom environment because that will assist them also in thinking about their actions in a more conscious manner. According to one teacher (cell 14) *"you may wonder what does that have to do*

with violence. If you just go through the actions then pretty soon you don't think about what you're doing and it leads to one thing after another and there's your violence, there's your cheating, there's your lying, and they just go up in steps. It's all learned behavior".

Some respondents were concerned that while schools had their individualized training in place they did not have uniform state-based training. One counselor (cell 12) suggested state-based training in order to maintain uniformity across schools. *"I think we need more on site training for dealing with situations like Columbine. It would be nice if the Arizona Department of Education or Health Services could just issue materials that we could use and be proactive. We could put these little pieces in place but if we can look at it from the perspective of being proactive, to prevent something on that level, I think that would get the message across more clearly".*

Inadequate safety related staff

A sufficient number of staff related to safety is required in order to maintain a safe school. SROs, aides, monitors, administrators, counselors, and teachers were some of the staff that were discussed by the interviewees. According to one principal (cell 5) classroom aides are essential for supervising kids in the classroom and maintaining discipline. *"One of our big problems is we don't have enough classroom aides, so not enough adult supervision to work with those students is a problem".*

On the same lines (cell 5) one principal pointed to the need for more monitors. *"I think that one of our big problems is not having enough personnel to monitor the campus. We just don't have it and so funding for monitors on campuses is crucial to making that happen, to providing more safe environments".*

Officers are a very important component of school safety. One bus driver (cell 7) revealed that *"we have only five full-time security officers where some other reservation schools could have as many as fifteen. That means these five people have to work round the clock, seven days a week, to try to keep this place secure and safe".*

Counselors play a very key role in assisting troubled students. One teacher (cell 15) remarked on the inadequacy of counseling in most schools. *"We have one full-time counselor and we have a student advisor, but I think you need more counseling help in most schools".*

Staff mobility

Mobility among teachers and staff has become problematic in many schools. Increased mobility hampers student contact with, and trust in, teachers and staff, which can in turn lead to discipline problems. According to a principal (cell 12) *"when there is leadership change there is a certain period, until that person gets their feet on the ground, when people keep doing what they want".*

On similar lines another principal (cell 15) noted the problems with excessive teacher mobility. *"The biggest problem with a rookie teacher isn't necessarily dealing with the subject material it's disciplining and managing a classroom"*.

Special education students

While special education laws were framed to aid the special education students, there are occasions where the laws end up harming students instead of assisting them. In the words of one principal (cell 12) it is important to use the law appropriately for best results. In the absence of that students can be subjected to risk. *"We tried to change his placement in his IEP. There is a school that has a special behaviorally disabled class for kids that need close supervision and everything. The parents said no we're not going to send him there, you need to provide him the appropriate education here, and so they just used the legal advocacy through special education"*.

In summary, this section discussed the perceptions of the interviewees with regard to lagging practices in school safety. Lagging policies, lack of prevention measures, unattended incidents, lack of uniformity/ consistency, lack of communication, lack of discipline, inadequate training, inadequate safety staff, and staff mobility were some of the topics that were discussed by the respondents in course of the interviews.

Issues pertaining to Special Education students

Twenty five percent of the respondents (five teachers and eleven principals) discussed discipline-related issues that they faced more specifically with special education students. While they did agree that these students shared similar problems with their regular-student counterparts, they stated concerns with legal restrictions on handling such students.

Behavior

One common thread through the discussion was the behavioral problems of special education students, and the difficulties other students, the teachers, and the staff face as a consequence of the same. One teacher (cell 9) revealed that *"we have a special needs population and some of those kids have issues that make it difficult for them to control their behaviors and so we need to take that into consideration and work with them. We have a lot of students who come from rather violent backgrounds and so we try to deal with those issues in terms of our discipline policies, and classroom management, but there are incidents that happen, and a lot of that's because of the population. Some of the children have problems with anger management, they'll flare up and attack, physically attack, verbally become aggressive, inciting and enflaming situations that are going on between them. And this isn't just limited to the special education kids and certainly not all of the special needs students fall in that, but a lot of them have been some of our worst discipline problems"*.

A similar observation was made by a principal (cell 5) on the frequent lack of self-control and inappropriate behavior from such students. *"You know, they're not tolerant, or they*

don't know how to behave or control their demeanor amongst adults. So they end up mouthing to adults more than anything else. Once in a while maybe an assault on an adult could happen, but mostly it's verbal abuse of adults".

Frequently special education students have substance abuse problems in addition to behavioral problems. One principal (cell 9) commented that *"most of our issues have been with drugs and fighting. A lot of the students in the special education classes tend to be gang members, a lot of them have behavior problems and there are a lot of drugs and it's constant. I'll suspend them long term and then when they come back they're here for a couple more weeks and they're gone"*.

Some staff members discussed that time is an important consideration in dealing with special education students. One principal (cell 13) observed that *"you end up doing a lot more counseling than you do enforcing discipline, which takes more time"*.

Classroom aides

Some interviewees pointed out the need for more aides in classrooms with special education students. One teacher (cell 3) perceived *"I think the toughest thing about teaching is we get more and more kids that are having problems that are coming in. I'd say probably about sixty percent of our kids would be classified as special education but they're not getting special education help. With crack babies, next year we will have about 6 or 7 kids who are in wheelchairs and need assistance"*.

Laws

Laws pertaining to special education students are made for the protection of these students. However, there are instances when these very laws can become restrictive and can cause more harm than good. One teacher (cell 3) mentioned *"we had a couple 8th grade kids in special education and they were terrors. They would cause all kinds of problems with all the different kids, just go up and do silly things like pushing and punching. All the administration would do is talk to them and they got worse and worse. We were very resentful that nothing was being done to the special education kids as far as trying to correct their behavior. We got to let it slide because they have special needs"*.

Like concerns were shared by a principal (cell 4) pertaining to laws for special education students. The principal discussed a case where a student could not be suspended despite being dangerous to his classmates. *"They said you have to keep them. So actually we put children in harms way big time with the student who would bring knives to school and threaten to kill people, and hold it to them and threaten to kill them and would cut them. He already has his 10 day suspension so I was told he has to be here, and that's wrong"*. Another principal (cell 11) commented *"I guess the biggest problem that I have is that when they get to a certain point I have to handle them differently than I do regular education students because of the law"*.

Abuse of the system

A disturbing account was provided by one principal (cell 15) on special education, but from a very different angle. The principal revealed a trend where many parents abuse the system by wanting their kids included in special education even though they are regular students. This is often done with the aim of making school simpler for their kids. *“We have now in our schools parents fighting to get their kids in special education. And they want them in special education for one of two reasons. The most common occurrence is the kid is an athlete and they want the kid to be eligible because if they are in special education they get either easier classes or they're graded different. We even have parents that want us to put in the IEP that the kid is on the varsity basketball team. The second is the group of people who have kids that have discipline problems, they flat out are problem children, they can't follow the rules, they have a chip on their shoulder. So mom and dad want them in special education so that we can't take as quick and as firm of action as we need to. So special education, as it was originally developed, is a wonderful program. But what has happened is people are learning about it, and now they are doing everything they can to take advantage of the system and use the fact that the kid is placed in special education to their advantage, with their own agenda. And they could care less about what the kid learns”.*

In summary, many interviewees brought up issues pertaining to special education laws. Some of the critical problems discussed were related to behavior and substance abuse. The need for more classroom aides was pointed out. Loopholes in laws pertaining to special education and voluntary parental abuse to the option of special education were also discussed.

Successful practices for school safety

In course of the interview almost all respondents discussed some practices from their schools that had proved to be successful with respect to school safety. Ninety seven percent of the respondents (two aides, two bus drivers, two counselors, three heads of security, sixteen principals, five SROs, and thirty-two teachers) discussed various school safety practices they perceived as successful in their schools. While some had these practices in place others anticipated benefits if they were implemented.

Successful programs

Prevention

All respondents in course of the interviews agreed that prevention is a key factor when it comes to school violence. In the words of a principal (cell 16) it is very advantageous to detect factors prior to a fight and prevent them from happening. *“When there's intimidation going on there's going to be a fight later. So the key is stepping in early not waiting until the fight breaks out. Identify the problems before they ever take place and that's what we try to do. I think our teachers are real good at that too”.*

Intervention

Enormous success can be attained with timely intervention to assist at risk students. In the words of a counselor (cell 3) interventions are very key in preventing student-related violence. *“Students are referred if there's signs that they are aggressive or if they have any type of behavior problems. Those ones that need psychological counseling or psychological evaluations are handled appropriately right away. I guess violence would happen if interventions are not made but we try to get them right then and there and help them out, it's important to give them support”*.

Conflict mediation

Programs pertaining to conflict mediation were deemed as very successful by schools that had them. In the words of a principal (cell 14) *“we do have a program for conflict mediation and that helps tremendously”*.

Symptom recognition

The interviewees discussed the wisdom of symptom recognition as a preventative approach to school violence. Attentive staff members aware of their students' moods and behaviors can usefully tackle problems through symptom recognition. According to a principal (cell 1) *“we need to stop every once in a while and say why doesn't this child smile anymore, or what's been the change in this child's behavior, she doesn't have any friends, or she's not with her friends anymore. I've had staff come to me and say you know this thing with this student scares me, something doesn't seem to add up. We as school people have got to be aware of how our children behave”*.

Crisis plan

Crisis plans were deemed as very useful by most schools. Most of the respondents agreed that it is very difficult to predict the reactions of students and staff at the time of an actual crisis. However, it is vital to have a plan in place as a guideline. According to one principal (cell 14) *“we really don't know how people would react when their lives are in danger and that came out clearly in the safety committee. In spite of that we need to have certain triggers that, once people got past the initial panic, they would think this is what I need to do, or this is the pamphlet that will at least give me some direction about what to do”*.

Site council

More and more schools have site councils now in order to discuss various issues including safety-related issues. This program was perceived as very successful by various respondents in course of the interviews. According to a teacher (cell 5) *Site Council is another very strong component of what we're seeing in the school. It's bringing teachers, parents, and students together. We have all those representatives on our Site Council and*

all of these things work together and help students be empowered. I think all of that has been so important in seeing the changes we've seen here".

GREAT

The GREAT program for gangs was considered beneficial as a preventative mechanism by various schools. One SRO (16) noted that *"the gangs were starting to grow. The GREAT program is really designed to keep kids from joining the gang and if you can insert the GREAT program into a community that already has low gang problems you can prevent them. I really believe it has prevented it here"*.

Lock down drills

In order to be prepared for any eventualities most schools now practice lock down drills. According to a head of security (cell 14) such drills are very beneficial and should not be taken lightly. *"We have lockdown policies that we're practicing, we have evacuation policies we're working on. I think those things should not be taken lightly. I think they should be taken very seriously"*.

After-school programs

After school programs were recognized as essential in keeping students away from trouble, especially in isolated communities or rural areas. The success of such programs was illustrated by a teacher (cell 5). *"I think having after school programs where kids don't have to be on the street is a good part of it. Trying to find mentors for students, not always academic tutors, but they need an adult just to come and visit with and validate the fact that they're worthwhile human beings, worthwhile spending time with"*.

Alternative schools

Alternative schools were discussed as successful means of schooling students with special needs, especially when they became dangerous to themselves and to others in the regular school environment. In the words of a teacher (cell 15) *"it's a sad state of affairs to think that sometimes you have to do send some students away but for the good of your school sometimes those things are necessary. After teaching for many years I'm a firm believer that some kids cannot get along in a social environment and maybe they need to go to another environment. I think that we need an alternative type setting for these kids that don't fit into traditional school learning. I like the school within a school"*.

Community involvement

There are instances where it proves to be more successful when members are brought in from the community to guide students towards safer behaviors rather than being guided by school policies. One teacher (cell 7) from a reservation school shared that elders from the nation are sometimes successful in guiding students away from violence. *"We have some of our native elders come in and they talk to the kids that this is not our way to be*

doing stuff like this, we need to respect who we are and our identity. There's a lot of that pushed on to our kids”.

Successful policies

Zero tolerance

Many schools adopt a zero tolerance policy towards various safety violations, like weapons, substance abuse, and intimidation. Zero tolerance policies were deemed as very useful in preventing or reducing incidents of violence in schools, especially if they are implemented towards the students and staff alike. In the words of a principal (cell 13) *“we don't tolerate drugs on this campus because it interferes with everybody's ability to get an education and we don't tolerate gangs on this campus. The real important part about our campus is that we have the same expectation of our teachers and ourselves. If a teacher acts inappropriate towards a student whether that's by using inappropriate language or you know, whatever, they're suspended. We feel like it's important that the students know that we're going to have the same expectations of our adults that we have of our students and I think it makes a big difference”.*

Locker checks

Some respondents discussed the benefits from random locker checks. According to a bus driver (cell 8) *“I think that that's something that should be done and not known ahead of time”.* Such random locker checks have been known to identify students possessing weapons and/ or drugs.

Dress codes

Dress code was considered a powerful mechanism in promoting a disciplined frame of mind among students. This in turn could help keep down violence in schools. According to a head of security (cell 14) *“I think uniforms are very important. I think if the kids were to wear them, even if it would be blue jeans, a white shirt and a tie, I still think it would put them in a different frame of mind”.*

A supporting perception in the words of a teacher (cell 6) was *“we've done some different things with tightening up the dress code and the expectations of students in the classroom, which has really minimized a lot of the disturbances and disruptions”.*

Hotlines

Student access to hotlines was considered as a safe and successful method of providing them with a place to share their concerns and or any suspicious information. One principal (cell 13) noted their attempt at hotlines with rewards for students who contribute safety-related information. *“We have a hotline so students can call in if they know of anything and it's anonymous and they get an award for that”.*

Informing students

An oft-debated issue is whether or not the students should be provided with details on various safety practices adopted by their schools. While some believe that students should be protected from too many details as it might make them anxious, others believe that they should be informed and kept in the loop. One principal (cell 2) discussed the benefits of keeping students informed. *“We did decide as a team that we were going to let the students know about it because they're going to know about it anyway after the first time it happens. I learned that from another school district I was at in the past. It was kept so secretive and when we actually were to practice it the kids were always asking what it was. The kids should know”*.

Corporal punishment

Views on corporal punishment were very diverse across the schools. While some agreed that it is a successful discipline mechanism others did not. In the words of a teacher (cell 16) corporal punishment is a successful method of maintaining discipline in schools. *“I think with the abolishment of corporal punishment in the classroom we just let the control go right out the window. The students today are not afraid to do anything because we can't do anything to them, other than take away some of their time with detention and suspension and that doesn't bother them at all. Spare the rod and you'll spoil the child”*.

Custodians

Some interviewees pointed out the benefits of confirming student custody. In the words of one aide (cell 1) it is important to confirm student checkouts for their safety. *“They have to check into the office. If so and so has to be picked up we make sure if it is okay with the parent, and we don't even let them go with a brother or a sister if they don't have permission to pick them up”*.

Visitors

Almost all schools have visitor sign-ins. While some schools are very strict with such policies others are more lenient. Some interviewees discussed the benefits of having strict policies on such issues in order to maintain safety. In the words of a principal (cell 16) *“all of our buildings are posted with no trespassing. When people come on our campus the first time we tell them to leave. We get their name and we record their name in a notebook. The next time round they're arrested. No one comes on this campus without our permission”*.

Separate the kids

Some respondents noted the benefits of separating kids based on their age/ grade during breaks in order keep them from fighting. In the words of one teacher (cell 3) *“breaking up the lunches is just incredible, the difference. We used to have three hundred kids running around in this little area, and teachers couldn't monitor what's going on. There*

would be food fights in the cafeteria, and now kids are cleaning up the cafeteria if they drop something, so it's been a big change with everything in general”.

School size

It has been heard many times that smaller schools make safer schools because of the personalized attention that students get from the teachers and staff. Respondents had perceptions on similar lines. In the words of a teacher (cell 4) *“I think that smaller schools is a solution to violence and discipline type problems in schools”.*

Uniformity/ consistency related success

All the schools that were interviewed considered uniformity and consistency as mantras when it came to disciplining students. The importance of such uniformity was repeatedly pointed out by most interviewees. In the words of an SRO (cell 11) *“I really think the administration has set their boundaries for the students as far as their discipline. We haven't had any problems with any kind of weapons brought to school this year and I believe that's all due to the administrations strict discipline, sticking to the same disciplinary actions with each student, not treating anybody differently”.*

According to a principal (cell 16) while consistency and fairness are essential what makes the process successful is cooperation at various levels. *“The key is not only having your rules and regulations written out. The real key is enforcement consistently and fairly to all kids. You need the support of your upper-level administrators at the district office and your school boards, you need cooperation of the various agencies in your community, with the police and with your court system, and the support of your community. Then you're going to be successful”.*

In the words of a teacher (cell 10) consistency earns respect from students which in turn leads to discipline. *“Every once in a while at the beginning of the year you may have one student at the school that may test the system. If they see that you're consistent from that point on they know what the rules are, they know what the consequences are, and as a result, the kids will respect you”.*

Communication related success

Open and constant communication between the students, staff, and the community aids in maintaining safe school environments. According to a teacher (cell 6) *“there's a lot of communication between teachers, faculty, staff, and the community that if there's a threat, or something comes up, and it might be something very small, a letter is sent home communicating that this happened today. It's very proactive to say we're going to make sure that everybody's aware of what's going on in the community as soon as we know what's happening”.*

Staff success

Adult access

It is important for students to know that they can easily access adults in the school when there is a need. Not only does this give the students a feeling of safety but it also encourages them to approach adults when they have any problems. One principal (cell 16) elaborated on the benefits of access. *“Just the presence of our administration out on campus. Our staff is out in the halls, there's a real visibility and kids tell us that you don't have problems when you have an adult around and you don't have problems when that adult's willing to confront problems. So we really expect our staff to do that and if they don't do that they're held accountable by the administration”*.

Open door policy

It is essential for staff to have an open door policy towards students and other staff in order to encourage them to talk about issues that might be concerning them, especially if they are safety related. One principal (cell 1) elaborated on promoting this idea personally. *“I've tried to foster that idea where anybody can come in and talk to me, parents, teachers, aides, cooks, bus drivers, maintenance people, kids, whatever, and I would hope that they feel that they can do that”*.

Cooperation

Cooperation among staff at all levels is essential in order to implement any policy consistently. One principal (cell 12) elaborated on the need for cooperation between staff in keeping schools safe. *“If we're down here in the office saying these are the procedures that are going to help our school be safe but the teachers who are in the classroom are interacting with the students in a variety of ways it is a problem. They have to be holding hands, that's the metaphor I use all the time”*.

From the perspective of a teacher (cell 13) cooperation from the administrators contributes greatly towards implementing discipline. *“I think that and an administration that respects the teachers and backs them up is the biggest thing”*.

Control

When it comes to discipline it is important for teachers to have some authority in classroom management. Many respondents were in agreement that such control, in place of a generic referral system, helps teachers take the right approach and maintain a disciplined environment. In the words of a principal (cell 10) *“our teachers are the authorities in this school, I'm not. They have the authority to suspend students and I don't do that unless I see something specifically that needs to be done. And every one of them knows that along with that comes the responsibility to act responsibly”*.

Mentors

A lot of the problems in classrooms stem from lack of adequate teacher management skills. Some respondents considered teacher mentor programs as successful in making new teachers feel comfortable and learn the required skills so they can maintain a safe classroom environment. In the words of a teacher (cell 3) *“I think it is important to get the teachers help rather than just put them out on their own to sink or swim. Where they're under the guidance of an experienced teacher for a period of time. And get principals to go in and help these teachers that are sinking. What do they say about a third of the teachers being failures within the first 3 years?”*.

Safety staff related success

Monitors

Monitors play a vital role in assisting schools in maintaining a safe environment. Various safety-related staff commented on the co-operative benefits that result from the efforts of monitors. In the words of one head of security (cell 14) *“I think more monitors. I think that would probably be my prime concern. The more eyes and the more ears you have, the better”*.

According to an SRO (cell 5) *“I think there's a lot of good monitors here, they watch. They do a good job of communicating with the kids and I have a lot of respect for them here”*.

School Resource Officers

The importance of SROs was stressed repeatedly in all schools, given the preventative role played by the officers in schools. In the words on one SRO (cell 13) *“I think there should be an SRO and a PO in every school. I think a lot of stuff could be prevented by having an SRO on campus. I've had students that sit in here and tell me they feel safer with a police officer on campus whether there's something going on or not. It teaches the children that there is a different side to law enforcement other than just hook and book and that they can confide in someone that can help them out with their problems. If you have the right person in the program, this program is phenomenal”*.

Student centered success

Advisory

Student advisory arrangements are beneficial for students because students are assigned adults they can go to at times of need. In the words of a teacher (cell 11) such programs can be very successful. *“A program where kids are known by an adult in the building better than a classroom teacher knows a kid. And the student and parent should be aware of who the advisor is. It doesn't have to be big but it's just to say I'm always here to talk to if you need to talk to me, let's look at your career opportunities, stuff like that, not a*

school counselor who has three hundred kids on their own roster but a teacher. I think that would break down some of the eruptions of what occurs”.

Attitude

Some respondents appreciated the benefits of inculcating a positive school culture in reducing violence. In the words of a principal (cell 10) *“Attitude is really a very important thing to us. Character and attitude and those things are really strong and there's a real strong influence around here of that”.*

Reward versus punishment

While many schools penalize students for not following rules some schools were of the opinion that it might be better to reward the students for their appropriate and non-violent behaviors. Such an approach was considered a very powerful mechanism by some. One principal (cell 10) observed that *“the thing that all of our kids hear when we discuss rules is the consequences for keeping the rules. Not the consequences for breaking them. What do you get when you follow the rules? You get the rewards that come from the classroom teacher, you get school wide rewards, you're allowed to go on our field trips, etc.”.*

Feeling of belonging

It is important for students to have a feeling of belonging to their school. Some respondents suggested methods that can be used to promote the same as it could go a long way in keeping students in a positive frame of mind and reducing school violence. One principal (cell 6) pointed that *“each individual kid needs to find some place where they're successful, they connect, and they belong. We just put into place many different programs. All the way from our performing arts programs to theatre programs to our sports program to our science fairs, to technology projects. Once they find a place where they belong they feel successful”.*

In summary, this section discussed the perceptions of the respondents with regard to successful practices in schools to reduce school violence. Various successful programs and policies were elaborated. Uniformity and communication were elaborated as key considerations. Successes pertaining to specific efforts from staff and towards students were also highlighted.

Successful training for school safety

While school violence can never be predicted, schools can become better equipped to deal with any unforeseen incidents with the aid of some basic training. Most interviewees discussed training available in their schools and also suggested some measures that can make the process more meaningful. Thirty nine percent of the respondents (two aides, two bus drivers, one counselor, one head of security, nine principals, two SROs, and eight teachers) discussed several successful training programs that have been adopted, or should be adopted, by various schools.

Crisis situations

Very often students get agitated or angry in the classroom environment. One aide (cell 2) revealed the need for training to calm down agitated persons. *“I think we should have a little training of what to do or what to say to the person and calm them down. Because we can only do what we're trained to do”*. As a suggestion for the same a principal (cell 4) described a program being used in their school. *“We participate in the Mandt program. The Mandt system is a systematic training program designed to help you de-escalate yourself and other people when you or they have lost control. It teaches how to handle people if they are going to endanger themselves, you never handle them, touch them, and you can de-escalate them verbally and through other ways”*.

Conflict resolution

Kids get into conflicts on a regular basis in the school. These conflicts if not resolved or controlled can turn into bigger situations requiring even more work. Many schools have, therefore, started training the teachers and staff on conflict resolution. One teacher (cell 4) noted that *“if we had some sort of training on anger management, conflict resolution, that sort of thing, I think it would help us deal with those jostling problems or he pushed me and I pushed him back sort of thing. Maybe the kids will then have a better understanding of their own feelings or their own anger, and we would probably be better counselors as teachers, as well as teachers”*.

Peer mediation

When students get into trouble in the school it is often very useful to have peer mediation in addition to other measures of resolving the problem. Training in peer mediation can be a very powerful tool in this connection. One teacher (cell 7) perceived a need for the same. *“We had that before but it kind of went down. I think peer mediation is really important. What makes those good kids be where they're at? What does it take? And I think it is really important for these kids to share this with kids that are looking at things that they shouldn't be looking at, drugs, alcohol and getting into fights”*.

Cultural diversity

Students interact with their culturally diverse peers for academic and miscellaneous reasons through the day. According to one principal (cell 13) training in cultural diversity can go a long way in reducing misunderstandings that emerge from such diversity. *“It is a well respected program, it talks about cultural diversity and gives opportunities for kids to talk about anything, like using a word that they didn't think could be hurtful to someone else and finding out that there are different meanings to those words. We saw that it is more beneficial if the students at a younger age learned those skills”*.

Sexual harassment

Just like students need to be taught to respect people from all cultural backgrounds and ethnicities, it is important for them to be taught gender respect also. One teacher (cell 9)

remarked that *“I teach sexual harassment here for the entire nation for all the schools. I don't let it become a big problem”*.

Substance abuse

Drugs are a very grave problem in many schools. It is essential for teachers and staff to have training in this area so they can recognize when their students need to be referred to some form of help. One principal (cell 11) shared information on an in-house program that was addressing this need successfully. *“Just recently we had a drug recognition expert come in and go through an in service with us, identifying certain things that we could look for with our students, as far as students being under the influence of drugs, signs and symptoms, and how to recognize different things”*.

Warning signs

Many times when any crime related incident takes place in the school, teachers and students agree that numerous warning signs preceded the incident. If teachers and staff are trained in recognizing these signs it can help prevent crises. One principal (cell 7) mentioned that *“that's something we can work on. We had a police officer come in at the beginning of the school year and he gave us presentations on some of their early warning signs. It was really helpful because it showed us what things we need to look at”*.

Dysfunctional families

According to one principal (cell 11) it is useful to have training to deal with kids from dysfunctional families. Such training might help in assisting them meaningfully and preventing any potential problems. *“I would like to be better versed in how to deal with students who come from dysfunctional households. It's hard for me to truly understand some of their situation because I've never experienced it”*.

Collaborative training suggestions

With respect to training in school safety various suggestions were put forth by interviewees. One bus driver (cell 7) expressed the need for a generic training assessment by professionals for all schools. *“The school can get a little more training through professionals down in the valley, or something like that to give us advice, to get us all on the same page”*.

One principal (cell 5) perceived a benefit from exchanging ideas with experts outside the district in order to get a fresh perspective on safety-related issues. *“It would be interesting to see someone from a different perspective, from outside of the district, come in and talk to us, or at least do an assessment of safety issues that they see at the school. Maybe we're looking through our own eyes and maybe that's not the best way”*.

On the same lines one SRO (cell 16) commented on how useful it would be to have training that incorporates lessons from other schools and what they are doing to maintain a safe environment. *“I would like to possibly attend some school violence classes or*

programs to see what is occurring at the other schools and how are they handling certain situations. It could assist me in the future if something like that happened here”.

Caveat

While most interviewees agreed on the benefits of training, there were some that were also skeptical about the real outcomes of training at times of crises in the school. One head of security (cell 6) pointed that *“the only question that comes to mind is that you sit around a group with adults and you talk about lock down drills, etc. But really when it comes down to it, if a guy walks in the door with a gun, what do you do? I think, at that point you just do the best you can for you and the people around you. Survival mode kicks in and you do what it takes”.*

In summary, this section discussed some successful training programs that have been implemented in various schools or that have been recommended for the future. Programs on crisis management, conflict resolution, peer mediation, cultural diversity, sexual harassment, substance abuse, and warning signs were discussed. Some suggestions for training were also put forth. Lastly, some interviewees agreed that while training is vital for school safety it is also impossible to be fully prepared for any unknown incident in the school.

Role of leadership

Many respondents perceived positive leadership qualities as a very important factor with regard to school discipline. Twenty three percent of the respondents (two principals and thirteen teachers) shared their thoughts on the benefits from positive leadership qualities with respect to school violence.

Positive leadership

Positive leadership skills can go a long way in boosting the morale of staff and students who can in turn help maintain a disciplined school environment. In discussing the quality of leadership one teacher (cell 5) shared that in addition to being a good administrator there is a need for visibility to students also. *“One intangible is the quality of the administration. There can be administrators who will strongly enforce whatever discipline they have to enforce, but the way that they do it, the kids come away feeling that yes, I got what I deserved and maybe knowing different ways that they can handle the same situation. And my guess is that it's all in how you do it, and at being visible other times too, not just being the disciplinarian, but being in the hall, and teasing kids and knowing their names”.*

One principal (cell 16) discussed the importance of a strong leadership in school discipline. *“I think another thing that made a difference is a strong administrative presence, a real strong leadership in the school, and the expectation from the top down that this is the way we want to run our school. The other thing is a realization by the students and the parents that our discipline policies were effective and that we were*

going to be very aggressive in our approach on discipline. That's made the difference here at the school. Also, a buy in, I think, not only from the staff but also from the parents and the student body”.

Consistency

Consistency of policy implementation is what sets apart schools that are successful in controlling school violence from schools that are in the process of accomplishing the same end. According to one teacher (cell 10) who expressed satisfaction with the school's safety aspects *“basically there's consistency at the school”*. According to another teacher (cell 5) one of their vice-principals *“is very consistent with discipline policy and how things are approached while the other is not as consistent”* and that could often lead to mixed signals for both the students and teachers.

While consistency is the key to discipline, inconsistencies can cause the reverse effect on school discipline. One teacher (cell 11) discussed how inconsistent administrators can cause a lot of negativity in the school. *“Last year we went through so many people”*. One administrator *“just didn't have a spine and was inconsistent. I don't think the kids really cared and there were a lot of kids outside of the classroom instead of in. Now you walk out there and you don't see anybody out on the patio, just not going to class. This administration is consistent and fair, and no matter who you are, it's the same discipline. They're on top of things; they keep teachers pretty aware of things that are going on. Depends on the administration, if it's a tighter administration, the discipline is better, if it's looser, then it's rougher”*.

Support

Administrative support for teachers is essential in order to assist them in implementing discipline successfully. One teacher (cell 13) highlighted the importance of the same by stating that *“I think the way we know the administration's going to back us up is very important. Because I know schools where they have the same rules we have here, sometimes even more, but if the administration doesn't back the teachers, it doesn't do any good and there you get the knock down drag out fights sort of thing”*. One other teacher (cell 15) shared the same view that *“I try to do my own discipline, and I've always felt very comfortable in being backed by administration if I had a problem”*.

Trust

When the leadership is strong and positive it tends to create a feeling of trust in students. They tend to approach the leaders with their problems that can then be prevented from escalating. One teacher (cell 15) brought up the benefits of students feeling comfortable with the administration. *“And I think that the students feel comfortable in going to their principal or assistant principal. Because they just come and ask if they can go talk to the principal or assistant principal and I send them and they come back and seem to be happier. I don't know what they're discussing, if it's a problem they've already been in*

trouble for or something that's on their mind, but I send a lot of them and I don't ask them".

In summary, the interviewees in this section discussed the role of positive leadership, consistency, and support in creating a disciplined school environment.

Positive student environment and school safety

One of the discussions that took place in course of the interviews, with respect to school violence, was the benefit that could result from providing a positive environment for students in school. Eleven percent of the respondents (seven teachers) agreed on the enormous benefits of providing students with positive environments.

Approachability

The importance of being accessible to students was discussed by many respondents. One teacher (cell 13) commented on the need that some students have to be heard. *"I think the big thing is having the administration and the teachers visible to the students and interacting with the students, it helps. I don't mean to go out and try to convince the student you're his friend, you're not. You can't be an equal, but you can be friendly to them and talk to them and listen to them and when you listen to them, I mean listen to them, you know, because quite often they don't want you to say anything, they just want to talk and that helps."*

In the words of another teacher (cell 15) it is essential to take kids seriously when approached with their problems because it might help prevent something bigger from happening. *"Kids would come to me and say I think there might be a potential problem developing, or so and so are having a problem and you might want to talk to them. I think they tend to do that with the people that they feel comfortable with and that they feel that are not going to embarrass them. I try to take things seriously if kids come to me and tell me there is a problem, obviously look into it or have somebody do it".* In other words, accessibility is considered as essential for student safety.

One teacher (cell 13) perceived a benefit from one-on-one attention for students. *"Early in the year they're not gonna come to you because they don't know you. But once you've established a rapport, and I think the students pick the teacher they go to, probably because they know what the teacher's going to say and how the teacher's going to react, they will come to you".*

Student involvement in activities

Involving students in school activities could prove to be beneficial as it gives students a feeling of belonging and pride which in turn can help abate criminal incidents. According to one teacher (cell 5) *"our big project right now is school beautification. Get it cleaned up, give them an environment that they can take pride in, that the kids have helped to work on. Those are real big issues in making the school a better place to be. And when the kids buy into it, they're going to be more proud of it, they're going to want to be here."*

That's a large part of why we don't have much trouble with the graffiti, because kids are saying, look, we've helped paint these walls, we've helped paint the murals, we've helped paint stuff here, don't do that here".

Home-like environment

It is considered essential to create a home like environment for the students and to provide them with a feeling of belonging. Once students get a feeling of belonging they tend to stay more disciplined. In the words of one teacher (cell 10) *"I tell my kids and my parents, when they come in for the teacher night, I'm the dad. You're children are mine when they're at school and I'm going to be the father while they're here. And if there's anything that I do that might offend them, or something that they do that will offend me, let's talk. We sit down and we talk". Then "they feel like people care about them and that they're going to get something out of it, what they're coming to school for. Which I think is what we're all about".*

In summary, positive student environments are very beneficial in providing students with a feeling of belonging and in giving them options if they feel they need to confide in teachers/ adults regarding safety issues.

This concludes this section pertaining to the influence of school factors on school safety. While schools might not be in a position to resolve most community, parental, and student factors with respect to school violence, they might be more successful in controlling their internal factors pertaining to school violence. It is essential for schools to evaluate and update their internal factors on an ongoing basis so that they can implement programs and practices tailored to their local needs.